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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: MINISTRY OF DEFENSE SEEKS U.S.
ENGAGEMENT

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) A
ND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Henri Ettien Amoikon, Director of the Minister of Defense's Cabinet, told Poloff August 21 that President Gbagbo told members of the Armed Forces (FANCI - Forces Armees Nationales de Cote d'Ivoire) August 14 that the Ivorian state will pay its year-long arrears of soldiers' bonuses. Kouassi Raphael, Chief of the Minister of Defense's Cabinet, said that President Gbagbo does not consider the issue of ranks of the Forces Nouvelles (FN) members to be integrated into the FANCI to be critical to progress on the Ouagadougou Political Accord (OPA). Raphael added that it is not a matter that needs to be resolved right away. Amoikon said the peace process is sufficiently advanced to permit lifting the arms embargo on Cote d'Ivoire. Raphael requested U.S. training for the FANCI and said Cote d'Ivoire needs U.S. engagement on fostering development. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Henri Ettien Amoikon, Director of the Minister of Defense's Cabinet, told Poloff August 21 that his office is focused on application of the OPA and achieving the unity of the country and the Armed Forces. Amoikon said that in his August 14 meeting with representatives of the FANCI, President Laurent Gbagbo said it is critical to emerge from the civil war for the good of the nation. According to Amoikon, Gbagbo said holding elections will improve the nation economy's and will make it easier to address the FANCI's quality of life concerns. Amoikon stated that Gbagbo told the FANCI that the year-long arrears in payment of soldiers' bonuses is a debt that the state will pay; Amoikon did not say that Gbagbo provided any timeframe for payment. Amoikon and Kouassi Raphael, Chief of the Minister of Defense's Cabinet, explained that the government is one year behind in payment of a food bonus of 180,000 CFA per month (US \$360) that soldiers have received since the civil war began. Amoikon told Poloff that solutions are being sought to address their concerns, which include the lack of uniforms and vehicles.

¶3. (C) Amoikon told Poloff that resolution of the ranks to be given to the Forces Nouvelles (FN) members who will be integrated into the FANCI is a "delicate problem" that will be solved by President Gbagbo, Prime Minister Soro, and OPA Facilitator and Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore. Amoikon added that they are discussing the issue, but have not yet found a solution. Raphael noted that the issue of the ranks of the FN soldiers who are reintegrated into the FANCI is not a problem since their ranks will be discussed by a committee and, by joining the FANCI, they agree to abide by its decisions. Raphael said the problem concerns the ranks that will be recognized for the FN members who want to retire from the Armed Forces. Raphael noted that President Gbagbo does not consider the issue of ranks to be critical to the

implementation of the OPA.

¶4. (C) Amoikon said the peace process is sufficiently advanced to permit lifting of the arms embargo on Cote d'Ivoire. Raphael said Cote d'Ivoire wants the U.S. to be its "partner." He requested U.S. training for the FANCI and said Cote d'Ivoire needs U.S. engagement to foster its development. Raphael said Cote d'Ivoire wants to learn how the U.S. became a country that "everyone wants to be a citizen of." He noted that Cote d'Ivoire does not always want to be a recipient of international aid.

¶5. (C) Comment: Embassy does not believe Cote d'Ivoire is far enough along in the peace process to permit lifting of the arms embargo at this time. Disarmament has not begun despite the symbolic burning of a small number of mostly obsolete weapons at 2 ceremonies. Resumption of arms purchases by the government would shake the fragile confidence that exists between the government and the FN. While according to the OPA, progress on disarmament should be well underway before elections take place, Jean-Luc Stalon, Chief of the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Unit told Poloff August 6 that the government is more focused on holding elections than on disarmament, which further undermines the arguments for lifting the embargo. OPA Facilitator Burkina Faso President Compaore sent the UN Security Council a letter requesting lifting of the arms embargo with the consent of both President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro, but this took place before the June 29 attack on Soro's plane, which has changed circumstances. The international community could consider lifting the arms embargo once either the disarmament process is completed or free and fair elections are held, whichever comes first.
HUDDLESTON